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ABSTRACT

Compassion, according to Nancy Rue (1991), is not pity. Compassion, Rue asserts, "involves a mixture of feeling one's kinship with others, being purely selfless (at least for the moment) and having the courage to get involved." P. M. Oliner (1983) wrote that "Prosocial content needs to show people behaving in giving and helping ways toward others. Teachers need to incorporate such materials into their ongoing social studies structure." This paper provides five activity ideas for teaching compassion in the elementary classroom and also offers a compassion role play. The paper cites 10 annotated ERIC sources on the subject of compassion. Contains three references. (BT)

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Sample Lessons Illustrating the Common Good with Elementary Students

TEACHING COMPASSION IN THE CLASSROOM

ED 482 206

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Compassion

Compassion is arguably one of the most important human values. Oliner, in her article, *Putting Compassion and Caring into Social Studies Classrooms*, states: "Love, care and compassion are the words we use to express motivations underlying the most human aspects of our conduct" (Oliner, 1983). Compassion goes beyond more commonly touted values such as cooperation and empathy, for compassion entails the outward expression of assistance or aid without concern or regard for one's own well being. Compassion acts are altruistic[1] acts that are seated in deep feelings of concern for others' plights. Indeed, acts that are considered most compassionate are those that are taken with some degree of personal risk or loss, including disapproval or retribution from one's own group.

Nancy Rue (1991) writes, compassion is not pity. "Pity is to compassion what a puddle is to the ocean. It's a more shallow thing...it doesn't go anywhere" (Rue, 1991, p. 11). Rue goes on to state that compassion is not lazy tolerance nor is it mere sentimentality. Compassion, she asserts, involves a mixture of feeling one's kinship with others, being purely selfless (at least for the moment), and having the courage to get involved.

Evan Staub (1992) points out in his chapter, *The Origins of Caring, Helping and Nonaggression: Parental Socialization, the Family System, Schools, and Cultural Influence*, that a society must value caring if it expects this value to be evident in the behavior of its citizens. Staub cites sociobiologists who assert that while altruism is part of the human genetic makeup, it must be activated and developed by experience. He correctly points out that the development of caring and altruistic behaviors grow out of a sense of connectedness that occurs when a child experiences positive expressions of others and comes to value and return them. This concurs with Oliner (1983) who wrote, "Prosocial content needs to show people behaving in giving and helping ways toward others. Teachers need to incorporate such materials into their ongoing social studies structures" (p. 274).

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[1] Altruism may be manifested in relatively impersonal acts such as helping clean up a roadway. Compassion, on the other hand involves direct human contacts.

ACTIVITY IDEAS[2]

- Develop a compassion stories bulletin board. Start with a definition and students' own pictures and stories of compassion. Add newspaper, newsmagazine, and on-line wire service reports to the bulletin board. Discuss each story and attempt to relate it to others. Group the items on the board in some schema or hierarchy.

- Engage the students in writing "compassion story" plays and skits. Use language arts concepts and objectives to critique elements of the plays and skits but be sure to include a thorough analysis and refinement of the actions for their compassion content. Perform the plays or skits at an open house or for another class.

- Encourage the students in your room to adopt a younger child who needs help. The help could be academic, social, or some form of physical assistance. Consider urging the students to keep a journal of the interactions so that you and/or parents may respond to the experience.

- Use role playing to help students analyze the thoughts and feelings that motivate altruistic and compassionate behavior. Use stories from sources such as *Reader's Digest* and *Scouting* as sources for dramatic material if you have trouble inventing your own ideas.

- Undertake a study of the teaching of various religions on compassion. In addition to printed resources, invite church officials in to talk about the topic. Make sure to invite all parents to such presentations and keep parents informed of your ongoing study of this topic.

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[2] Some of these activity ideas are adapted from Oliner's 1983 *Social Education* article.

Compassion Role Play

Characters:

Timothy, a fifth grade boy

Sam, Timothy's brother, and a middle school soccer player

Timothy's mom

Scene:

It's Saturday morning and Sam, your older brother, is already sitting in front of the television watching cartoons. His leg is propped high in the air and wrapped tightly with Ace bandages. He looks like he's in pain and hasn't slept much. Mom's already up and cooking in the kitchen. You walk over toward Sam and ask what happened. Sam chokes as he tries to answer and tears start to well up in his eyes. "I tore some ligaments in my knee at the soccer game and I've got to go to the doctor. The coach says I'm probably out for the rest of the season."

About that time Mom comes out of the kitchen with a tray of food for Sam. She seems concerned about Sam's comfort as she helps him get positioned to eat. "It was some fall, okay. I was scared to death that it might be broken."

Timothy senses now how serious the injury is. He wants to help his brother feel better, so he decides to stick close to him. "Mom, can I eat out here too?" he asks.

"Yes, I'll be back in a minute with a tray for you" she replies.

Role Play #1: Timothy and Sam eating breakfast with Timothy trying to help Sam feel better.

Role Play #2: Timothy, Sam, and Mom at the doctor's office discussing bad news: the knee will have to be "scoped".

Role Play #3: Timothy at school the next day explaining to some friends what happened to his brother.

SOURCES ON COMPASSION

ERIC Sources

TITLE: Putting Compassion and Caring into Social Studies Classrooms.
AUTHOR: Oliner, Pearl M.
JOURNAL TITLE: Social Education v47 n4 p273-76 Apr 1983;
ABSTRACT: The most obvious clue of the general absence of prosociality in social studies texts is the general omission of prosocial concepts in their organizing frameworks. Practical ideas for infusing social studies curricula with prosocial content are presented. (RM)

TITLE: Caring and Capable Kids: An Activity Guide for Teaching Kindness, Tolerance, Self-Control and Responsibility.
AUTHOR: Williams, Linda K. And Others
PUBLISHED: 1996; Innerchoice Publishing, P.O. Box 2476, Spring Valley, CA 91979 (Activity book, $18.95; a cassette tape of songs in this book by composer Linda K. Williams is also available).
DESCRIPTION: 210 pages -- 3 fiche (ED395697)
ABSTRACT: With the purpose of developing caring and capable children, this book offers teachers and counselors a collection of over 75 activities as teaching and guidance tools. Characteristics of caring and capable children, which reflect the development of empathy, compassion, assertiveness, and self-discipline, are described. The activities are grouped into the following eight developmental units: (1) kindness; (2) tolerance; (3) respect; (4) service to others; (5) responsibility; (6) self-control; (7) peer pressure; and (8) ethical decision making. The first component of each unit is a short story that embodies the unit theme, followed by questions to facilitate an exchange of reactions to the story. Also following each story is a sheet for students to record their personal responses to the story and similar situations that they may have experienced. The subsequent four or five activities in each unit are designed as small-group discussions, called "sharing circles." Their purpose and the process of their implementation are described in the introductory chapter. In addition, four to six class activities are included in each unit. The final component of each unit consists of song lyrics that relate to the theme of the unit, and reinforce the lessons learned from the unit. Adaptations to activities are suggested for younger students, and may also be made to suit different ability levels, cultural backgrounds, and interests of students. (BAC)

TITLE: Homelessness: A Resource Guide for Grades 1-12. Helping Children and Youth To Understand and Be Involved.
AUTHOR: Iowa State Dept. of Education, Des Moines. PUBLISHED: 1994 MAR
DESCRIPTION: 144 pages -- 2 fiche (ED372834)
ABSTRACT: Developed by Iowa educators, this guide contains 23 sample lessons that offer guidelines for addressing the issue of homelessness with students in grades 1-12. The lesson plans were developed for varying age and ability levels, and slight changes can make them usable in a variety of settings to accomplish many different purposes. Resources are identified throughout the guide. The first section contains 6 lessons for grades 1-5 and includes topics such as identifying basic needs for survival, homes

around the world, and understanding homelessness. The second section is a whole-language unit for the middle school, grades 6, 7, and 8. The 12 lessons in this section address topics such as stereotyping and judging, problems related to homelessness, and empathy and compassion for the homeless. The third section, for grades 9-12, contains 23 lessons that cover topics such as when and why people become homeless, governments and homeless people, who is helping homeless people, and how to get involved. The guide includes a resource list of organizations and materials, and a list of participants in the Speaker's Bureau on Homelessness in Iowa. Contains 175 references. (TJQ)

TITLE: Compassion: A Selection of Materials for Teaching Traditional Values.
AUTHOR: Agresto, John
JOURNAL TITLE: American Educator: The Professional Journal of the American Federation of Teachers v6 n2 p19-30 Sum 1982;
ABSTRACT: Discusses the difference between sentimentality and compassion and provides various literary excerpts, drawings, photographs, and a list of additional resources that can be used in the classroom to develop compassion among students. (GC)

TITLE: Growing good kids : 28 activities to enhance self-awareness, compassion, and leadership
AUTHOR: Delisle, Deb, 1953-
PUBLISHED: Minneapolis : Free Spirit Pub., 1996
ISBN: 1575420090

TITLE: The peaceful classroom : 162 easy ways to teach preschoolers compassion and cooperation
AUTHOR: Smith, Charles A.
PUBLISHED: Mt. Rainier, Md.: Gryphon House, 1993
ISBN: 0876591659

TITLE: The value of compassion
AUTHOR: Rue, Nancy N.
PUBLISHED: New York : Rosen Pub. Group, 1991
SERIES: The encyclopedia of ethical behavior
ISBN: 082391240X

TITLE: Choosing to feel: Virtue, friendship, and compassion for friends.
AUTHOR: Cates, Diana Fritz.
PUBLISHED: Notre Dame, Ind. : University of Notre Dame Press, c1997.
DESCRIPTION: x, 298 p. ; 24 cm.
SUBJECTS: Ethics: Aristotle, Ethics: Thomas, Aquinas, Saint, 1225-1274, Ethics, Caring, Friendship--Moral and ethical aspects.
NOTES: Includes bibliographical references (p. 277-286) and index.
ISBN: 0268008140 (alk. paper)

TITLE: Toward a caring society: ideas into action.
AUTHOR: Oliner, Pearl M.
PUBLISHED: Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1995.
DESCRIPTION: x, 240 p. ; 24 cm.
SUBJECTS: Altruism, Caring, Helping behavior.
NOTES: Includes bibliographical references (p. {211}-234) and index.
ISBN: 0275951987 0275954536 (pbk.)

TITLE: Teaching elementary social studies; a rational and humanistic approach.
AUTHOR: Oliner, Pearl M.
PUBLISHED: New York : Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, c1976.
DESCRIPTION: xv, 381 p.: ill. ; 25 cm.
SUBJECTS: Social sciences--Study and teaching (Elementary)
NOTES: Includes index. Bibliography: p. 364-371.

Other Sources

Staub, E. (1992) The origins of caring, helping and nonaggression: Parental socialization, the family system, schools, and cultural influence. In P. M. Oliner, S. P. Oliner, L. Baron, L. A. Blum, D. L. Krebs, & M. Z. Smolenska, (Eds), *Embracing the other: Philosophical, psychological, and historical perspectives on altrusim.* New York: New York University Press.

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